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COMMISSIONER

RECEIVED

April 16, 2003

APR 17 2003

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
c/o Vistronix, Inc.
236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. Suite 110
Washington, DC 20002

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Re: In the Matter of Schools and Libraries Universal Support Mechanism,
CC Docket No. 02-6, and
In the Matter of Federal Joint Board on Universal Service,
CC Docket No. 96-45

Subject: Request for Immediate Relief by the State of Tennessee

Dear Ms. Dortch:

I am writing to urge you to grant the State of Tennessee's recently filed Request for Immediate Relief to secure the federal funding necessary to sustain the State's critical Internet access. Immediate attention to the State's request is imperative. Internet services for over 1,600 K-12 schools, 900,000 students, and 65,000 teachers and administrators hinge on these federal funds.

As the newly appointed Commissioner of Education and as a lifelong educator, I understand the tremendous beneficial impact that the Internet has had on student learning, professional development, and achievement. Tennessee is a diverse state, with rural school districts as well as large urban areas. Many school districts are in remote locations, and they, along with other districts, do not have the fiscal capacity to support teachers with specialized certification, advanced placement courses, and staff development facilities. The Internet makes these opportunities available to smaller, or remote districts at a reasonable cost.

A loss in funding to areas that rely so extensively on the Internet for instructional, professional, and communication needs would have an immediate and devastating effect on students and teachers. This is particularly true at the end of the school year when lost instructional time cannot be recovered. Further, the loss of this invaluable resource

increases the likelihood that a school will not make the adequate yearly progress required by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

Internet-based programs currently assist students in preparing for Gateway tests (high school exit exams) and advanced placement courses necessary for graduation. Certain classrooms are "paperless" and rely entirely on technology and the Internet. Numerous teachers and schools have received grants to continue to develop creative instructional programs via the Internet. The Internet also is critical for the delivery of staff development programs, especially in the rural and smaller school districts. All of these programs would be lost without federal funding.

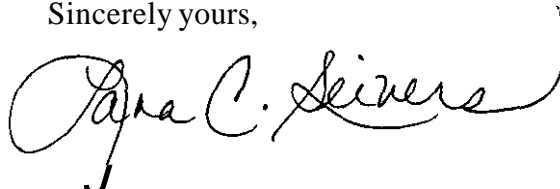
Almost half of Tennessee's students have little or no access to the Internet at home. These students represent some of the poorest communities (approximately 75 of 138 school districts) that rely on the Internet to improve and exceed minimum proficiency standards. In fact, without the critical federal funding for Internet at schools, these students will have no Internet access at all.

Communication would be tremendously affected by the loss of the Internet. All e-mail accounts would be discontinued, thereby severely diminishing communication between educators, schools, districts, parents, and the State Department of Education. School and district web sites provide a service to families and to communities and serve as an important source of information for potential residents as well as economic development.

It should be noted that loss of the Internet would create significant problems in the electronic transmission of student data required by the State. Currently State funding is based upon each school district's submission of attendance data, and interruption of this system would present serious problems.

It is extremely important to the quality of education that Tennessee's schools continue to have access to the Internet. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that the FCC approve the State's Request for Immediate Relief. To that end, I hope that you will give this matter the immediate attention it deserves. Without your assistance, instructional strategies will regress, the digital divide will be even more evident, access to an infinite number of resources will be lost, and students and teachers of the State of Tennessee will face irreparable harm.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lana C. Seivers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Lana C. Seivers
Commissioner of Education

Cc: William Maher